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MANAGEMENT'S 'GENUINE BENEVOLENCE' & WORKER COMMITMENT TO HEALTH & SAFETY – A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Kenneth Lawani¹, Billy Hare², Iain Cameron³ and Sharon Dick⁴

^{1,2,3,4} *Department of Construction and Surveying, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow G4 0BA*

The engagement or disengagement of workers within their workplace involves the workers using different degrees of their physical, cognitive, and emotional selves during the performance of their roles. Previous research has consistently identified the significance of developing a highly engaged workforce and the construction industry seeks to enhance levels of engagement to influence greater worker commitment to Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). The significance of worker commitment lies in the perception of predicting positive performance and improvement of OSH at work. This phenomenological study reviewed extant literature by adopting an acceptable commitment theory; used focus group meetings and Delphi technique to agree on the proposed set of theoretical themes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with workers to establish and validate the commitment themes. Three levels of worker commitment (conditional, compliance and citizenship) were operationalized to evaluate if workers truly perceive that their organization or management genuinely inspires them to work safely to achieve compliance or citizenship commitments. The findings identified no element of conditional commitment amongst the workers probably because it was challenging getting access to disengaged workers to speak to. It also revealed that some operatives perceive that their organization predominantly persuade them to commit to OSH to avoid fines and claims rather than being genuinely benevolent for the wellbeing of the workforce. Furthermore, the findings indicated a split in the number of workers performing OSH roles to attain compliance commitment (legislation driven) and citizenship commitment (going above-and-beyond compliance).

Keywords: Genuine benevolence, Commitment, Conditional, Compliance, Citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of construction worker commitment to OSH lies in their perception of its significance in predicting positive performance at work and improvement of construction OSH (Cameron et al. 2006). Benevolence in the context of this paper is the perception of a positive orientation of the management toward the worker. Holste & Fields (2010) consider trust (encompassing benevolence) as affect-based and it is grounded in mutual care and concern between workers. Therefore, the concept of 'genuine benevolence' relates to the extent management genuinely cares for the OSH of workers. This is also related to an important element of reciprocity in trust (Scholefield 2000). For workers to be engaged and to reinforce their commitment within an organisation, the concept of reciprocity which underpins employer/worker relationship plays a big role. When an employer invests in a worker's wellbeing, there is tendency for the worker to feel valued and reciprocate directly with renewed employee loyalty through hard work and improved performance efficiency. This can lead to higher levels of engagement, greater focus on achieving organisational goals and increased motivation at work which can significantly improve mental and physical

¹ Kenneth.Lawani@gcu.ac.uk

wellbeing; (Meyer et al. 2012). According to Ehin (2013), this means that for an organisation to succeed, its systems and practices need to have flexible capacity not only supporting its organisational/business goals but also the physiological and mental needs of its members.

This study reflects on the **three-component model (TCM)** of worker perceptions and their commitment to their organisation/occupation based on the work of Meyer & Allen (1991) that all commitment mind sets have an implication for membership decisions, (Tsoumbri & Xenikou 2010). Some lines of research on commitment are also grounded in **interdependence theory**; a relationship continues when the outcomes from that relationship are beneficial and satisfying to the people involved (Le & Agnew 2003). Although commitment is regarded as the subjective experience of dependence, research has categorised this concept into three broad groups of ‘*affective*’ (**citizenship commitment**) - emotional attachment of workers caused by their identification with the objectives and values of their organisations; ‘*normative*’ (**compliance commitment**) – attachment of workers to the organization based on loyalty or a moral obligation to the organization; and ‘*continuance*’ (**conditional commitment**) - workers feeling a sense of commitment to their organization because they feel they have to remain or due to the perceived cost associated with leaving; (Meyer & Allen 1997; Meyer et al. 1993; Meyer & Allen 1991; Meyer & Herscovitch 2001; Weng et al. 2010; Meyer et al. 2015). In adopting the TCM theory, this study aligned the essence of worker commitment to behavioural based safety theories of citizenship (Hofmann et al. 2003); compliance; and conditional commitments.

Benevolence

The conceptual understanding of benevolence builds on the work of Mayer et al. (1995); Mayer & Gavin (2005); and Schoorman et al. (2007). It is believed that benevolence is a quality of a relationship and it is more influential (than integrity) as an antecedent of trust in a long-term relationship. Benevolence is the perception of a positive orientation of the manager toward the worker. It is the extent to which a supervisor or manager is believed to want to do good to the worker, aside from a self-centred profit motive and this is believed to be dependent on some sort of specific attachment e.g. the length of time and their relationship working together on projects. Some of the benevolent qualities include loyalty, openness, availability, caring, supportiveness, and demonstration of concern towards workers. This is because the manager or supervisor desires to help the worker, even though they are not indebted to be helpful, and there is no extrinsic reward for such a manager or supervisor.

Conditional Commitment

Conditional commitment can be viewed from two perspectives: as disjunctive goals, which makes the workers under-committed to the conditional goal due to the lack of connection or consistency, or as conjunctive goals which makes the worker over-committed, (Vandenberghe et al. 2011). This is when workers feel a sense of commitment (**mind-set of cost-avoidance**) to their organisation because they feel they have to remain (Meyer et al. 1993). The opportunity for work-based learning is an important precursor of worker-job-attitudes and behaviours and if the present job allows for the development of a range of job skills and OSH, then conditional commitment of the worker would presumably be high as there is potentially much to be lost by seeking a change of job. On the other hand, workers who perceive little professional development within their current job have little to sacrifice by leaving and are likely to exhibit low conditional commitment. This type of commitment occurs when certain conditions apply e.g. remunerations, pensions; seniority etc.; see (Meyer & Allen 1997) e.g. fixing a safety problem or speaking to someone about safety results in loss of productivity and therefore earnings.

Compliance Commitment

Compliance commitment refers to the worker's attachment to the organisation based on a moral obligation (**mind-set of obligation**) or a sense of indebtedness for benefits received from the organisation (Meyer et al. 1993; Meyer & Parfyonova 2010; Meyer & Herscovitch 2001; Herscovitch & Meyer 2002; Somers 2009, 2010). Workers with high compliance commitment tend to remain in the organisation because they believe it is morally right to do so. These workers have the mindset that they have an obligation to pursue a course of action of relevance to a particular target (Meyer & Herscovitch 2001; Meyer & Allen 1997). Organisations with workforce displaying compliance or **normative** commitment will get the job done with acceptable results, but their goal will not exceed satisfactory results or achieving exceptional outcomes. Studies have identified that compliance commitment of workers tend to correlate strongly with citizenship commitment (affective) and to share many of the same antecedents and consequences (Meyer et al. 2002). Cohen (2007) however, argued that commitment based on obligation or indebtedness (compliance) might best be considered as a commitment tendency rather than a constituent of commitment and that it can be viewed as a precursor to citizenship commitment.

Citizenship Commitment

Citizenship commitment refers to workers' attachment to their workplace caused by their identification (**mind-set of desire**) with the objectives and values of their organisations (Meyer & Parfyonova 2010; Morin et al. 2011). This means, workers are loyal to and choose to remain with their company because they want to (Meyer et al. 1993) or due to the ability of workers to satisfy their OSH needs at work; (Vandenberghe et al. 2011). Therefore, citizenship commitment will be higher for workers whose experiences in their organisation satisfy their OSH needs than for those with less satisfying organisational experiences. Workers who care about their work and their organisation tend to exhibit both emotional and citizenship commitment in terms of engagement. Their commitment is not driven by money or other incentives, but by the satisfaction at contributing towards the organisation's OSH goals. This type of commitment is more self-driven than any amount of money or tangible reward because it encourages the workers to invest a greater amount of time and energy in their role. Workers who exhibit citizenship forms of commitment go above and beyond compliance; they proactively promote safety messages; they exhibit affective commitment (Meyer & Allen 1997) by enjoying their job and showing some level of satisfaction from their contributions to improved H&S standards. Research indicates that workers with strong citizenship commitment and compliance commitment to a change initiative tend to exhibit the highest levels of discretionary support for the initiative (Meyer et al. 2007; Herscovitch & Meyer 2002; Hofmann et al. 2003).

METHODS

Phenomenological research design was implemented during the course of this study, (Creswell 2013, 2014; Creswell & Poth 2017; Marshall & Rossman 2016). A purposeful sampling strategy for construction sites and workers was utilised by selecting from a pool of site options made available by seven contractors. A total of 13 projects ranging from house building to large scale civil engineering were involved in the data collection phase. Eight projects were used for developing the commitment framework and five projects for validation. This study conducted 28 semi-structured open-ended interviews with operatives and supervisors to develop the commitment framework until the themes being investigated reached saturation, (Charmaz 2014). The average timeframe for individual interview was 40 minutes. The workers involved were representative of the geographical spread of construction

work across mainland Britain. Delphi technique was used for developing the framework by involving a team of six experts from the Steering Group with the aim of achieving convergence of opinions for grouping statements from the operatives and supervisors; see (Hsu & Sandford 2007; Hasson et al. 2000). Three iterative phases of the ranking were carried out until consensus was established for worker commitment. Ethical issues such as personal disclosure, authenticity, credibility, role of the researcher and personal privacy were also addressed, see (Israel & Hay 2006; Creswell 2014). The validation of commitment and genuine benevolence (on five projects) involved 22 additional workers that volunteered to participate. The contractors were encouraged to involve their engaged workforce within the operatives and supervisory level. The criteria for engaged operatives were workers deemed as showing interest in OSH issues; contributing to H&S and regularly attending H&S meetings; whilst engaged supervisors were those who encourage engagement within and outside the workplace and regularly discuss OSH issues with other workers.

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS & DISCUSSIONS

The findings, analysis and discussions of this study present the results of commitment and benevolence in the context of OSH within the construction industry.

Benevolence

The validation exercise for genuine benevolence indicated that trust between workers and the organisation is the extent to which the workers are willing to ascribe good intentions and have confidence in the words and actions of other workers, supervisors, managers and the company. The results show that workers perceived elements of lack of genuine benevolence in some cases while others perceive genuine benevolence from management, managers and supervisors regarding H&S (compliance or citizenship). Extracts from the validation regarding *'why do you think management wants to keep you safe and healthy'* were categorised by associating lack of genuine benevolence with conditional commitment; genuine benevolence associated with compliance and citizenship commitment:

LACK OF GENUINE BENEVOLENCE (CONDITIONAL)	GENUINE BENEVOLENCE (COMPLIANCE)	GENUINE BENEVOLENCE (CITIZENSHIP)
<i>'I work for an agency, so you are treated differently, I've found that everywhere'</i>	<i>'Because if they didn't they will have a lawsuit in their hands; they will comply with the rules and regulations; they have a duty of care to the workers'.</i>	<i>'I am been treated very well, they look after me, I'm enjoying it. That's how they want to be treated, they want to be going home safe every day and they want workers to do the same'</i>
<i>'The general consensus among men is they feel the management are H&S focused to keep the insurance cost down'</i>	<i>'It's in the management interest to keep you safe and healthy and I am here to do my own job and do it right and to go home safely; they don't want to have bad record with HSE and they will need it for bidding for other jobs'</i>	<i>'I don't struggle for anything, everything is put in place. They don't want any accidents on their job; you don't want to be going home and say to your wife I had a man killed on my site today'</i>

The extracts from workers show their perceptions in relation to the benevolence of management regarding their OSH. It indicates that some workers perceive the management as lacking genuine benevolence because they are treated differently and with the focus of H&S specifically due to cost cutting and insurance purposes; i.e. their organization predominantly persuade them to commit to OSH to avoid fines and claims rather than being genuinely benevolent for the wellbeing of the workforce. Other workers perceive the organisational

benevolence is aligned to elements of managements' compliance with the regulations. However, some workers perceive elements of managements' genuine benevolence because they care about the welfare of workers and also their responsibility to train the workers in OSH. This study observed that just as perceptions about benevolence will have an impact on how much trust the worker can garner, these perceptions affect the extent to which the workers trust their organisation. The works of **Scholefield (2000)**; **Schoorman et al. (2007)** and **Berwick (2003)** indicate that the development and sustainment of trust in the management can considerably lead to competitive advantage. Therefore, nurturing higher levels of genuine benevolence would be a worthy goal for management to pursue. This is relevant as research shows that trust within the workplace can increase organisational effectiveness (**Bussing 2002**). The result from this study indicates that the relationship between genuine benevolence and workplace performance may operate primarily through workers engaging in discretionary behaviour which can be identified in workers that display citizenship form of commitment.

Commitment

Workforce commitment was grouped into three broad categories founded on the work of (**Meyer & Allen 1991**): **conditional commitment**; **compliance commitment**; and **citizenship commitment**. The validation of worker commitment revealed that none of the workers showed perceptions of conditional commitment but rather, displayed compliance and citizenship forms of commitment. It is pertinent to clarify that employers were not deliberately asked for 'disengaged' workers as this could lead to prejudice and discrimination within the workplace. Eleven workers discussed issues related to 'compliance commitment' while the other 11 discussed issues above and beyond compliance i.e. citizenship commitment.

Compliance Commitment

Organisation with a workforce that display compliance commitment are obliged to work to the rules due to training opportunities, rewards or a need to remain with the organisation and other benefits (**Meyer & Parfyonova 2010**). Workers that display compliance commitment stay in the company because they believe it is the right and moral thing to do. A worker that the company has contributed to his/her career growth (e.g. education, mentoring) will feel a moral sense of obligation to give back to the organisation in return by been compliant. The validation interviews identified some attributes of compliance based on the perceptions of workers when asked to '*describe what you do when you see something unsafe?*'

'If I see something unsafe I'll need to report it; if it's something you won't like to see.'

'If I see anything unsafe and I was stood next to somebody in authority, I will tell them directly.'

'I'll go over and say something, the boy might tell me to f-off; and then you can go to the line manager.'

Eleven workers displayed compliance form of commitment relevant to OSH issues. These set of workers conform and do what is required of them but no more than the legal requirement. This study identified that operatives majorly fitted into this group but however, some also perceived genuine benevolence from the management. Typically, the operatives tend to undertake just enough to keep their role but with their compliance commitment; it could be considered as an important motivational force that has influenced and benefited both employers and workers. Therefore, workers should perceive it as a sense of moral duty rather than an indebted obligation. Workers with a strong sense of moral duty tend to perceive the

organisational OSH ideology and therefore commit to its meaningful objectives and support the organisation in its efforts.

Citizenship Commitment

Workers that demonstrated citizenship commitment showed a sense of attachment to their company as a result of their identification with the objectives and values of their company. This reflected their loyalty to the company and their ability to fulfil and satisfy their OSH needs at work. These workers tend to go above and beyond compliance; proactively promote safety messages and derive some level of enjoyment and satisfaction from contributing to improving the OSH standards within their company. The validation interviews revealed some of the attributes of citizenship commitment based on perceptions of the workers when asked to *'describe what you do when you see something unsafe?'*

'When I see something unsafe I'll fix it. I will act on it right away.'

'I will sort it out, I'll try not to walk by but it's difficult sometimes when it's not your area of expertise.'

'If I can rectify it myself then I will, if not I will try and get hold of somebody, a supervisor or whoever is in charge of that area and get it to their attention, it will have to stop until its sorted.'

'If I see something unsafe I'll action it immediately by stopping and sorting it, but depending on the scale, if it's on a bigger scale then it will be directed up the line to managers. If it's a subcontractor then I'll find a way to action it.'

Eleven workers displayed citizenship forms of commitment and these were mostly workers on supervisory roles. It would be expected that these workers would also perceive higher levels of genuine benevolence within their workplaces but the validation indicated that some supervisors felt there was a lack of genuine benevolence from senior management in some H&S situations. Supervisors that have experienced career growth tend to be positively associated with displaying citizenship organisational commitment. However, the validation identified that although citizenship commitment might be higher for supervisors because their employers satisfy their needs, their perception of genuine benevolence might not always be same. Similarly, workers that have been with their employer over a period of time tend to show higher citizenship commitment than workers that have been with the organisation over a shorter period of time. Therefore, workers will display high levels of citizenship commitment when they truly believe in what they and their organisation are doing; believe they are making a difference and believe it is genuinely reciprocal.

CONCLUSIONS

This study adopted the three-component model approach to assess workforce perceptions regarding genuine benevolence and worker commitment. The study reveals that majority of workers that displayed compliance commitment were operatives and this is not in any way unexpected. The demands of high productivity versus safety; time pressure and performance within the industry are potential reasons why most operatives tend to function more within the sphere of compliance commitment rather than operatives reflecting a strong citizenship commitment to their organization. However, it is suggested that there may be substantially greater benefits for both employers and operatives when compliance commitment is experienced as a moral duty rather than an obligation. The benefits derived from compliance commitment experienced as a moral duty can in some ways lead to citizenship commitment which was majorly displayed by supervisors. Although this study assessed various operatives

and supervisors, the result indicated that there were differentiations across the profiles with supervisors accounting for mostly citizenship commitment behaviours to their organization and occupation. Although conditional, compliance and citizenship forms of commitment were expected to tie workers to the organisation and reduce turnover, one of the major reasons for distinguishing among them was the belief that they can have different implications for on-the-job behaviour. This study can infer that citizenship commitment is most strongly associated with job performance and OSH, followed by compliance commitment and conditional commitment.

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